

A Comprehensive Study Guide for Hannah Kent's "Burial Rites"

Hannah Kent's "Burial Rites" is a haunting and unforgettable novel that transports readers to 17th-century Iceland, where they witness the unraveling fate of Agnus Magnusdottir, a young woman accused of murder. This study guide is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the novel, including its characters, historical context, literary themes, and more, to enhance your reading experience and deepen your understanding of this powerful work.



Study Guide for Hannah Kent's Burial Rites (Course Hero Study Guides) by Course Hero

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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Screen Reader : Supported
Paperback : 144 pages
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Characters

Agnus Magnusdottir

The protagonist of the novel, Agnus Magnusdottir, is a young woman who is accused of murdering her former master, Natan Ketilsson. As the story

unfolds, readers witness Agnus's struggle with guilt, fear, and the societal pressures that ultimately lead to her execution.



Jón Jónsson

Jón Jónsson, a kind-hearted farmer, is responsible for overseeing Agnus's execution. Despite his duty, Jón develops a deep compassion for Agnus and struggles with his own moral conflicts regarding her fate.



Jón Jónsson, the farmer who oversees Agnus's execution

Margrét

Margrét, a devout and superstitious woman, is chosen to be Agnus's caretaker during her final days. Despite her initial prejudice, Margrét gradually comes to sympathize with Agnus and provides her with some measure of comfort.



Gunnur

Gunnur, a wealthy and influential woman, is the one who initially accuses Agnus of murder. Her motives remain shrouded in mystery, but her hatred for Agnus seems to stem from a combination of jealousy and personal vendettas.



Gunnur, the woman who accuses Agnus of murder

Historical Context

"Burial Rites" is set in 17th-century Iceland, a time of great poverty, superstition, and harsh living conditions. The novel provides a vivid glimpse into the lives of ordinary people in this remote and unforgiving landscape.

The execution of Agnus Magnúsdóttir is based on a real-life event that took place in 1629. Kent's novel fictionalizes the account, but it remains faithful to the historical context of the time.

Literary Themes

"Burial Rites" explores a number of important literary themes, including:

Guilt and Redemption

Agnus's guilt over her supposed crime is a central theme throughout the novel. As she awaits her execution, she grapples with the question of whether or not she truly deserves to die. Jón Jónsson, too, struggles with feelings of guilt over his role in Agnus's death.

Justice and Society

The novel raises questions about the nature of justice and the role of society in punishing those who break the law. The execution of Agnus is seen by some as a necessary act of justice, while others question whether she truly received a fair trial.

Isolation and Loneliness

Agnus is an isolated figure throughout the novel. She is shunned by her community, and even those who care for her are unable to fully understand her experience. Her isolation mirrors the loneliness of the Icelandic landscape itself.

Gender Roles

"Burial Rites" explores the roles of women in 17th-century Iceland. Agnus is a strong and independent woman, but she is ultimately limited by the societal expectations placed upon her. The novel also highlights the double standards that existed between men and women at the time.

Discussion Questions

To enhance your understanding of "Burial Rites," consider the following discussion questions:

* How does Kent portray the character of Agnus Magnusdottir? To what extent is she a sympathetic figure? * Discuss the role of Jón Jónsson in the novel. How does his relationship with Agnus change over time? * Analyze the historical context of "Burial Rites." How does the setting influence the characters and events of the novel? * Explore the literary themes present in "Burial Rites." How do these themes resonate with you as a reader? * Discuss the novel's ending. To what extent do you believe justice is served?

"Burial Rites" is a powerful and moving novel that deserves a place among the classics of literature. Hannah Kent's evocative writing and unforgettable characters will stay with you long after you finish reading. This study guide provides a comprehensive overview of the novel, but there is still much more to discover within its pages. We encourage you to immerse yourself in the world of "Burial Rites" and to explore its themes, characters, and historical context in greater depth.



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